

# THE CULTURE OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN JÓZEF TISCHNER'S PHILOSOPHY

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## **Abstract**

In Józef Tischner's philosophy, culture is understood as reflecting the human spirit and, thus, expressing human identity. A human being is not so much born into a specific culture, as through experience, becomes its participant. Tischner combines culture with the notions of patriotism and art. Patriotism involves dialogue with other cultures, which broadens the horizons of each culture in its self-understanding. In turn, art is closely related to the ethical nature of a human being. By implementing specific values, a human being is the creator of culture when he/she experiences the presence of another human subject on the horizon. The category describing this experience is the interpersonal relationship understood as an interpersonal encounter, or the event of being 'face to face', in which, through a mutual exchange of the 'space of contact', we learn about our similarities and 'otherness'. The event of the encounter is of a dramatic nature because it creates an obligation in one person towards another. The critical issue here is the inadequacy of the description of the experience in relation to the experience itself. The way to solve this problem is to discover the dialogical nature of interpersonal relationships. In these relationships, 'the fullest realization of reciprocity' is love. This article aims to demonstrate that Józef Tischner's understanding of the culture of interpersonal relationships can be used in research on culture, mainly within the area of intercultural dialogue, as well as in research on the axiological foundations of culture.

*Keywords:* culture, encounter, values, interpersonal relationships, intercultural dialogue

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## **1. Introduction**

The philosophical expertise of Józef Tischner (1931-2000) was shaped primarily by phenomenology as well as by the influence of the fellow founder of this philosophical direction - Roman Ingarden. It was within the framework of phenomenology that Tischner conducted research in philosophy of consciousness, axiology, ethics, existentialism or philosophy of dialogue. The central focus of Tischner's work was the philosophy of a man. Within its framework, the

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philosopher viewed a human primarily as a dramatic being, existing within the horizon of good and evil. It also became an area of Tischner's interest in the aforementioned areas of research to address the issues of culture and the interpersonal encounter. The question worth posing here is whether the philosophy of encounter as seen by Jozef Tischner can be applied to research devoted to culture, including mainly in the area of intercultural dialogue, as well as to research devoted to the axiological foundations of culture.

## **2. Human being as a participant in culture**

In Tischner's view, culture is created by a man as his 'image of himself' and, at the same time, as 'this image of man present in culture' creates a man. In his work, the philosopher refers to understanding culture through the prism of the human spirit. In this spirit, Tischner identifies the source of what is most human in a man, claiming that: "Culture is like a mirror of the soul. When there is no culture, no one can see the soul [...] Man loses the memory of who he is." [1]. Culture in Tischner's view is, therefore, an expression, a reflection of what is deepest in a man, a revelation of the human spirit in some form. A man is aware of who he is precisely because of culture. In the philosopher's thought, culture is not primarily a human's ability to use language or knowledge of the history, beliefs, literature or art of a particular social group. Nor, at its deepest core, it is a set of moral and social norms. According to Tischner, while all of these categories are the products of culture, at their core there is what describes culture more fundamentally than its expressions. This is because what is fundamental to culture, the source, is experience, and it is a kind of participation. The philosopher observes: "It's as if someone listens to music and starts dancing. This dancing is an expression of his participation in the music." [2]. To experience culture, therefore, is to participate in it. This participation, in turn, is related to one's responsibility for the survival of culture. For culture is not something that belongs to the realm of 'nature'. This means that a person is not 'born' a member of a certain culture, but 'becomes' a participant in it. In this sense, culture is a product of history; at one point, it appeared on the stage of history and, at some point, it may disappear from that stage [3]. It is from here that there is a certain obligation directed to a man to take responsibility for his own culture.

Tischner links the issue of culture to the concepts of homeland and nation. He notes: "Homeland is an element of culture, and there is no other way to save the homeland than to develop culture" [4] and he also declares that: "A nation is a product and part of a culture" [3]. The development of culture, including work on the national ethos are, for this reason, a kind of work on culture, and, at the same time, they are an expression of patriotism. However, this patriotism in relation to culture is not limited to what is 'domestic'. On the contrary, the relationship between culture and patriotism is expressed in the openness to other nations, in dialogue with different cultures. Patriotism understood in this way is threatened by nationalism, "which is an ideological justification for the violence that one nation uses against another nation. (...) Overcoming nationalism and other deviant ideologies is possible only through a return to the fundamentals of culture,

especially to the ideas of freedom and truth properly understood.” [3]. Tischner writes: “In fact, Poland and Europe were already a mixture of nations and peoples before, for example, during the period of partitions. And yet Polish culture radiated, not because Warsaw was populated by Poles alone, rather the opposite: because Warsaw was multinational (likewise other cities, such as Lviv). Culture does not grow in isolation from the rest of the world, but in dialogue and some kind of tension” [4]. He also asks: “Didn’t many foreigners find themselves in Polish culture? They not only assimilated Polish culture, but were also its creators. [...] What would we be without such people? What would we be without people who became a bridge between our and other cultures?” [5]. In Joseph Tischner’s opinion, therefore, the culture of a given nation is not threatened by the encounter of that culture with the culture of other nations. On the contrary, in this encounter, both cultures find their own identities by confronting them with a different perspective. This different perspective opens and expands the axiological horizon of the culture. This happens through the search for and confirmation of one’s own identity in the differences and similarities discovered. This issue concerns the understanding of a man in his most fundamental, axiological embodiment. It is in this perspective that man’s inner truth is adequately revealed only in a dialogical horizon. This means that man’s identity is formed only through acceptance, recognition, a certain confirmation from the other, “however, not in existence as such, but in the value of this existence”. The philosopher notes: “Recognition is not recognition in being, but recognition of value”; “The man who presents himself, saying *I am a teacher*, proposes for recognition a value that is both his value and the value for others.” [6]. Thus, on the horizon of the interpersonal encounter, the axiological character of man’s inner reality is discovered, which reality is simultaneously opened and expanded by what a man is made aware of by the other human subject [7].

One cannot omit the perspective of Gorals, a category referring to the culture of the highlanders - the mountain people - when the relationship between culture and patriotism as seen by Joseph Tischner is perceived. In this regard, the philosopher is a pioneer not only in supporting the development of Podhale folk culture, but also in striving to ‘crystallize the idea of Goralism’. It is in Goralism that Tischner finds a ‘direct expression of life’, a particular truth about a man in the optics of cultural participation. This participation is impossible to adequately reproduce with the help of abstract concepts. For it is expressed in the existential truth of a man, which is contained in the Goral tradition (sculpture, painting, textiles, poetry, music or dance). The universality of folk culture, in turn, is due to the fact that it teaches ‘to look at life and use it wisely’ and, at the same time, it is a synthesis of many influences, the result of dialogue including the recognition of difference. Tischner writes: “The peculiarity of Podhale is [...] the mixture of many influences, the presence of various groups of settlers. What can unite all these people is not race, but culture, which was created by combining these different elements. [...] Goral culture was formed in dialogue, in openness to various influences, it was based on the recognition of differences” [8]. According to Tischner, folk culture ‘lives’ with certain values, but ‘learns’ them only through comparative reflection against other cultures. And in this respect, the greatness of

folk culture becomes apparent, which is the greatness of being human. Tischner remarks: “This culture [...] talks about how a Goral, through his life experience, can enrich the truth about a man, can serve a man, can serve humanity” [9].

Related to the concept of culture is the issue of art. Art plays a fundamental role in uncovering the existential truths of a man, and, thus, in serving humanity and showing fundamental values. In Joseph Tischner’s philosophy, it is artists who are particularly sensitive to fundamental values, including, above all, the value of another human being. The philosopher notes: “The artist makes people stop, marvel at the world, ponder, admire, mourn over another’s misfortune, think not only about themselves. Art [...] is the first school of truth. God created the world, its truth, but it is the artist who makes a gift to people from this world and this truth” [10]. Tischner does not limit the notion of creativity/artistry to the activities of only people associated with art. In his view, the creative activity is ethics, i.e. the world of values by which a man lives. In Tischner’s assumption, each ethical situation is individual and unique, so it is impossible to establish the unambiguous criteria to defy the ethical character of all human behavior. The philosopher states: “It is impossible to give a theory, a finite theory of the ethical act, because it is impossible to give a finite theory and an unambiguous method of creating works of art. Here discovery reigns, and it does in ethics as well. [...] And now this is important: there is no ethical act without creativity and without the risks associated with this creativity” [11]. The Cracow psychiatrist, Antoni Kępiński, who was highly regarded by Tischner, spoke in a similar manner, stressing that “every contact with another human being is to a greater or lesser degree unpredictable and unmarkable. The more direct and intimate the contact is, the lower is its degree of determinacy” [12]. Ethics, therefore, resembles the shaping of a certain work of art. By embodying certain values, a man, in a way, builds himself and his world and, therefore, also creates culture, taking personal responsibility for these values [13]. There would be no ethics, but also no culture, if it were not for the awareness of the presence of another person.

### **3. Problematic nature of interpersonal meetings**

In Joseph Tischner’s philosophy, the fundamental concept for describing an interpersonal encounter is the face. Unlike things that have appearances through which things ‘appear’ to people, the face (not the appearance, veil or mask) ‘reveals’ itself to the other, and in this way is an expression of what is deepest in a man, i.e. spiritual. An encounter, therefore, means a relationship ‘face to face’. In this relationship, the inner truth of a man is revealed, i.e. who a human is in essence. For this reason, the encounter is the most profound of human experiences. According to Tischner, to encounter is not so much to be aware of the presence of the other human being next to you or with you. An encounter is an event, a reaching out towards the other [14]. The event of the encounter reveals to its participants a certain drama. This drama is expressed in the fact that the other person “confronts me through some kind of claim, in the wake of which a sense of obligation arises in me. The awareness that the other is present completes itself as an awareness of a claim - a claim that obligates” [14]. From the awareness of

the other's presence, the belief arises in a man that a person's salvation or doom 'is in his hands'. The encounter involves the transformation of the 'space of intercourse' in which people communicate with each other. This means that those who meet are aware of a possible movement - moving away or coming closer. This is a certain breach, a novelty in the space of mutual communing with each other. Tischner writes: "The previously indifferent space becomes a space crisscrossed by possible paths. [...] The space crossed by roads is the elementary space of freedom. [...] We view our own freedom as a possible movement on the road" [15].

This change in the space of intercourse is mutual. This means that at the moment of the encounter everything changes in a certain way for its participants. What is most surprising in this relationship is the separateness of the other person. The person being met turns out to be 'different' from me. Through the relationship with him, my previous way of being is challenged, I begin to search for a new one. A certain paradoxical reciprocity is revealed. Tischner notes: "The other [...] is different from me, and yet similar to me - similar in otherness and different in similarity. [...] The otherness of the other brings out my own otherness. Otherness is mutual. [...] Here is a mother looking at her own daughter and discovering in her... herself. Here is a father looking at his son and seeing... himself. And yet, despite the similarities, there are important differences. The daughter is and remains different, the son is and remains different" [15]. There is no clearly defined boundary between these similarities and differences. Instead, there is a dramatic 'community of destiny'.

The encounter of 'otherness' thus carries a certain risk. It becomes apparent in the - intrinsically conflicting - 'clash' of various 'othernesses' in their axiological endowment. For in the encounter, the human subject experiences himself as a value and, at the same time, understands himself and others through the 'prism of similar value'. Moreover, a human subject, to some extent, acquires the identity through the knowledge of himself acquired precisely through others. A man lives in the constant tension that exists between his experiencing of himself as 'I-for-others' and 'I-for-self'. In this experiencing of the self, the human identity related to reciprocity with another 'I' is expressed. Due to this, the human does not 'lose himself in the other', but through him, in a way, returns to himself. Tischner believes that the condition for knowing the 'other' is openness. This means that a person decides for himself whether or not he will let himself be known to someone, whether or not he will experience reciprocity and the gratitude that comes with it. The philosopher explains: "When living in an attitude of gratitude, a man forgets himself, for he thinks of others who have been and are good to him. But such self-forgetfulness does not at all lead to a man's ruin, but, on the contrary, to his regeneration and restoration" [16].

Joseph Tischner's philosophy thus refutes the view, which is expressed in the claim that there are two fundamental and radical possibilities in the human encounter: either to choose (and thus secure) one's own individual identity closed to others, or to accept the radical otherness of the other at the cost of losing something most valuable to me. In Tischner's view, human self-understanding necessarily involves the experience and understanding of another human subject.

This means that the awareness of the identity must be recognized, confirmed by the 'other'. For in this recognition of it, self-discovery takes place. Tischner emphasizes: "A man cannot assimilate himself if he does not assimilate another man who stands before him as a stranger" [6]. In an interpersonal encounter, the 'stranger'/'other' therefore plays a key role in my personal recognition of myself. If it were not for his mediation, I would not know who I really am. For I am myself precisely through him, his recognition [6]. My 'I' takes shape, gains identity in the presence of the other, in his axiological assimilation, which takes place in the experience of encounter. In this encounter, a person discovers the other in his or her value, and through this, he or she experiences himself or herself as a value in a primary manner.

The difficulty Tischner notes in describing an interpersonal encounter is the objectifying nature of this description. Namely, the essence of the problem lies in the need to use conceptual language to express what, as an event/experience, eludes such descriptions. In other words, an encounter is a different concept from its description. The philosopher notes: "The paradox of thinking directed toward the source is that the source is essentially dialogical and the language that describes it is intentional. Dialogicality is a type of experience" [15]. The mutual opening to each other of two humans does not take place in the most basic way in the area of intentional consciousness (the other person is not primarily the object/content of my consciousness). Intentionality is present here but it loses its importance, hiding in dialogicality. Fundamental is the dialogic dimension of the event/experience of the encounter (dialogic intention). This is expressed in the fact that what is fundamental in an encounter is not that 'someone' speaks to me and 'how' they speak, but what is fundamental is the experience of someone speaking 'to me', talking 'with me'. Dialogicality manifests itself in this orientation of intentional awareness. When I hear an encouragement from another to make me pay attention to something (e.g. look at what a beautiful painting), then this something becomes important not only to him, but also to me.

In the interpersonal dialogue, an important assumption that should be made by all parties to the dialogue is that the individual cognition of the truth about oneself is always partial, illusory. Only by opening up to the perspective of the other, looking at oneself, in a way, from the outside, does this cognition become objective. Tischner writes: "The full truth is the product of shared experiences - yours about me, and mine about you." [17]. A prerequisite for openness to the other, and thus a basic requirement for dialogue, is the ability to 'empathize' with the other's point of view. This empathy presupposes the recognition that the other 'from his point of view is a little right', and therefore 'I am not quite right'. The reciprocity of such assumptions makes the two points of view 'rise above each other' (come out of their hiding places), begin to trust each other, build community, and invent a language that means the same to all parties to the dialogue. What is important in the dialogue, therefore, is not so much the exchange of opinions, but the mutual investigation of the truth. This pursuit of truth can take place both in arguing with others (confirming differences) and in discovering mutual similarities.

#### **4. Love as the discovery and recognition of *otherness***

‘The inner force of man’s openness’ to the ‘other’, the ‘fullest realization of reciprocity,’ is love, the expression of which is generosity. Love here, therefore, is not morbid altruism, which manifests more love for others than for oneself. Love involves the experience of a certain duty. Tischner notes: “Reciprocity entails an obligation. Obligation is a sense of reciprocity, and striking even deeper, it is a sense of participation. [...] duty is closely related to love.” [18]. The expression of this duty is, first of all, a concern for the other person, i.e. to desire good for him. All this takes place on the axiological plane of individuality, where love discovers the other as someone valuable/precious. The philosopher claims: “Love is communication, even better - communion, which develops on the plane of axiological individuality” [19]. This axiological individuality highlights the unique way in which a person experiences life (his ‘inner twist of consciousness’).

According to Tischner, love ‘affirms and sustains the otherness’ of its personal subjects. In this relationship, not only is the other person ‘other’ to ‘me’, but also ‘I’ myself am ‘other’ to myself. In this way, the ‘I’ does not understand itself solely at the level of ‘I-in-myself and for myself’, but becomes ‘I-with-another’/‘I-for-another’ [15]. Thus, the experience of love reveals mutual ‘otherness’, but also causes a mutual change in the viewpoints of those experiencing the experience. A person who loves, to some extent, resembles the one he loves (‘loses himself’). This involves a renunciation of self, which is at the same time a recovery of self. The philosopher notes: “By giving herself to the child, the mother becomes all the more a mother. The child gives back to her who she is. One is created through the other.” [16; 20]. The analogy with the therapeutic practice described by Antoni Kepinski can be explored here again. He states: “Usually only the effect the doctor has on the patient is taken into account, forgetting that there is also an effect in the opposite direction: that of the patient on the doctor.” [21]. This ‘crossover’ of mutual dialogic confusion and simultaneous recognition of each other confirms the value of both subjects. Of course, this is accompanied by a certain risk, the threat of rejection or betrayal, which accompanies any love. But alongside this risk, love allows one to hope to save what is at risk. For in this risk a man affirms himself, i.e. he affirms his capacity for risk. Someone who responds to my love endures this risk [6]. In this way, he validates me in the very core of my existence, in my absolute and unconditional (‘no matter what’) value. Tischner writes: “Recognition of the value of a man means love for a man.” [13].

#### **5. Possibilities of applying Joseph Tischner’s philosophy in culture studies**

Joseph Tischner’s philosophy is widely employed in cultural studies. His concept of culture as participation, dialogicity and the axiological dimension of interpersonal encounter can be a valuable point of reference in the analysis of contemporary social problems, media ethics, education and cultural anthropology.

One of the key challenges of contemporary culture is media ethics and the quality of public debate. Tischner’s notion of ‘dialogic truth’ and reflection on the

importance of encounter can provide a basis for research that explores the role of journalism and media spaces in building responsible communication. In a world of disinformation, fake news, and social polarization, his thought can provide tools for analyzing the ethical standards of media coverage.

Tischner's philosophy makes it possible to examine whether the media promote a culture of dialogue and mutual recognition, or whether they contribute to social division and the objectification of human beings through aggressive rhetoric. In practice, the philosopher's concepts can support the development of modern models of media ethics, where intentionality of the message and information pluralism play a significant role. On their basis, training programs for journalists can also be developed, considering both the technical aspects of work and the ethical consequences of editorial decisions and conflicts of interest.

According to Tischner's view, culture is not given to a man by nature but is a reality in which he participates and for which he bears responsibility. His reflections on identity formation through culture can be applied to the study on education and cultural pedagogy. They can be inspired by questions about how educational systems shape young people's cultural consciousness and their capacity for dialogue and openness to diversity.

Tischner's ideas can also be the basis for creating educational modules that consider culture as a space for participation and reflection on one's own identity. Such an approach fosters a critical look at local traditions and values, as well as the integration of different fields of knowledge, i.e. history, art, ethnography, philosophy, and ethics, to portray culture as a dynamic whole.

Tischner's analysis of highland culture as a unique form of cultural participation provides the tools to study the role of local traditions in the construction of social identity. Contemporary cultural anthropology, which studies the mediums of regional identity, i.e. sculpture, music, dance, folk art, can benefit from his reflections on the relationality and openness of culture.

Tischner's ideas can also inspire research on the impact of globalization on local traditions. The analysis of folk heritage in the context of contemporary challenges can serve as a case study in cultural anthropology, showing how local culture adapts and enriches itself in contact with other traditions while maintaining its distinctiveness. Also of significance is the examination of the impact of migration and intercultural dialogue on the preservation of unique regional characteristics.

Tischner's concept of patriotism, characterized by a focus on cultural concern and dialogue with other nations, can serve as a valuable analytical framework for contemporary debates on national identity and multiculturalism. In a period marked by tensions between diverse notions of patriotism, Tischner's philosophical perspective enables us to perceive culture as a domain for dialogue and mutual recognition, rather than one of exclusion.

The practical applications of this concept encompass research endeavours investigating the impact of cross-cultural interactions on the development of national identity. Furthermore, the cultivation of cultural initiatives, such as festivals, exhibitions, and art competitions, is recommended. These initiatives

should promote patriotism not as a form of closure, but rather as an openness to diversity and the exchange of experiences.

Tischner emphasized that art has a crucial role in discovering the truth of a man and building community. His reflections on the artistic dimension of ethics and participation can inspire contemporary artists for projects that combine art with reflection on values and the human condition. In real life, this involves organizing cultural events that engage audiences in the process of creating and interpreting culture. It could also be an exploration of one's own identity through art, for instance, classes in painting, sculpture, poetry, or dance, in which creativity becomes a form of dialogue among participants. It would also be worthwhile to employ Tischner's ideas to study the contemporary understanding of the role of the artist and his responsibility for shaping social sensibilities.

In conclusion, Joseph Tischner's philosophy offers a wide range of applications in the cultural sciences. It can inspire both theoretical cultural research and practical activities in the areas of media ethics, education, anthropology, multiculturalism, and the arts. The examples presented here show that Tischner's ideas can be a valuable tool for analysing contemporary cultural problems, while pointing to the fundamental importance of dialogue, encounter, and values in shaping humanity.

## **6. Conclusion**

The categories of culture and interpersonal encounter cited above are, and, in this context, the potential applications of the philosopher's research in cultural studies, in our opinion, just an outline of what the philosophical thought of Joseph Tischner brings to the field of research on intercultural dialogue or the axiological foundations of culture. Understanding culture through the prism of the human spirit, the role of experience as a basis for reflection on culture or the dialogical opening of culture to 'otherness' in the scope of interpersonal encounters are the key to posing further questions about the applicability of the philosopher's research in the cultural sciences.

The encounter with different cultures always creates something new. In the era of globalization (universalization), this poses an additional challenge to the search for the principles of social life based on what hides the 'inside' of every human being, namely, universal values, among which love and 'thinking the truth' lead the way. Such an assumption highlights the source spiritual (not material) dimension of culture and the necessity of dialogue with the other in intercultural communication [22]. Joseph Tischner's proposal meets such needs.

The axiological sources of both the understanding of culture and the interpersonal encounter in Tischner's terms make it possible to base further exploration in these research areas on what, in the recognition of mutual cultural differences, leads to the subjective treatment of participants in the 'other' culture, and thus to finding one's own identity in confrontation with this 'otherness'. In Tischner's philosophical proposal, culture reveals the values among which a man lives. Values are the foundation of any culture. This is because they form the human way of looking at the world and shape human actions towards others.

Culture, like a man himself, cannot develop in isolation. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the need for the coexistence of different perspectives, including different perceptions of certain values and traditions and their influence on cultural identity. The sphere of experienced values here provides a certain background for intercultural encounters. This sphere reveals certain values, their hierarchies to the participants of the cultures. Toward these values, a man feels an obligation. This obligation includes the search for a new plane of being, a new meaning. For a man's way of being in a particular culture becomes problematized in the encounter with a 'foreign'/'other' culture. This problematization also concerns the mutual ability to resemble each other's hierarchy of values from within which the participants of the encounter enter into the dialogue with each other. It is the encounter with different cultures, opening up to the difference, taking into account the perspective of the other that conditions the readiness for internal change and mutual education [23]. Through what is common but also different in the meeting of certain cultures, the cultures gain their own identities, and thus new meaning and richness. The meeting of cultures is created by its participants, and at the same time these participants are the axiological materials of this meeting. In this sense, the encounter is a kind of key to the axiology of intercultural understanding, which always requires taking into account the perspective of the other. This perspective reveals to each party to the dialogue new possibilities for recognizing a different culture in its axiological endowment.

The categories of 'foreignness'/'otherness' of the other can, therefore, certainly be interpreted culturally. After all, this 'foreignness'/'otherness' in relation to culture is fundamental in an intercultural encounter. Without it, openness, reciprocity or solidarity between participants of different cultures are not possible. Only by accepting, recognizing the value of another person's culture, I am able to create communication/communion with him. Culture is then the horizon of our meeting 'face to face'. This encounter, in turn, is an expression of a very different logic from the one that is based more on caution and calculating, rather than a risky search for language that means the same thing to both sides, and trust that together we can arrive at the truth. The essence of the problem lies in the ability and willingness to transcend what is a rational distance. Tischner identified it as follows: "The evolution of modern societies has gone primarily in the direction of creating distance. This is rational: *May the other not follow me, then I will not follow him either*. This motivation comes from interest. But in order to move from this distance to a charitable gesture, to bring food to the other, a completely different logic must be activated. The logic of interest only leads to windowless monads, to the appearance of loving one's neighbor - but that's all." [2].

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